

JESUS' RELATIONSHIP WITH WOMEN
A PORTRAIT OF THE FOLLOWERS, ACQUAINTANCES, AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS

By

David Ray Allen, Jr.

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Approved:

(signature of Dr. Bart Ehrman, advisor)

Reader: Dr. Zlatko Pleše

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For A. Donald and Hazel Allen

“The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.”
- Wendell Berry

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INTRODUCTION

In the last century impressive strides have been made to usher in an era of scholarship that extensively examines Jesus' relationship with women and the role of women within the origins of early Christianity. Over the course of my research for this thesis I read monographs and articles written in the last 50 years that were referred to as groundbreaking, firsts within the discipline, rare, new, and fresh by reviewers. Although Christianity has been studied and critiqued at great lengths for almost two millennia, the exploration of the impact women had in Jesus' ministry and the early church has only recently begun to be fully investigated, which is reflected in the way reviewers described the studies. The door, once firmly closed, was pulled ajar by women like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Ross Shepard Kraemer who wrote books on the broad topic of women in Christianity using different methods – Schüssler Fiorenza focusing on a feminist theological reconstruction of texts and Shepard Kraemer looking at the role of women within a variety of religions in the Greco-Roman world. Although unique in their nature, both authors raised critical questions and made provocative statements that have laid the groundwork for future studies within the sub-field.

While these two scholars approached women during the dawn of Christianity in different ways, so, too, do I desire to have a unique approach in my study. Throughout my thesis I will examine both the canonical and historical Jesus' relationship with women. A comprehensive study would not be complete without a thorough survey of the canonical Gospels, because the canonical Jesus – whom most Christians pray to, look to for guidance, and hear about on Sunday mornings – has informed the way Christians view the role of women since the canon was formed. On the other hand, the study of the historical Jesus provides the historical criteria necessary to reconstruct what Jesus was most likely saying and doing. The canonical Jesus can

be both informative of how ancient writers depicted Jesus in their respective Gospels and help explain how theologians, scholars, and laypeople alike have interpreted the four authors portrayal of Jesus for centuries, and the historical Jesus can assist in the process of determining what is most likely Jesus truly said through critical historical methods.

Within the study of the Jesus' relationship with women, there are three driving questions that will guide my discussion – who were Jesus' women followers and what were they doing? How did Jesus treat women whom he met throughout his ministry? Were any of Jesus' historical teachings particularly attractive to women, and if so, what were they? These three questions each hit on a unique subset of women: those who were with Jesus frequently as followers, others who encountered him on occasion, and those who never met him, but heard his teachings. For the purposes of the first two questions I will use the canonical Gospels to examine Jesus' relationship with his women followers and the women whom he meets, and for the final question I will compare studies of the historical Jesus to determine which of his teachings would have been attractive to women of the time.

Throughout this thesis I do not intend to follow suit with either Schüssler Fiorenza or Shepard Kraemer by primarily looking at Jesus' relationship with women through the lens of feminist reconstruction or by comparing with other religions at that time, although each may be used briefly. Instead, I intend to depict what Jesus' relationships with women looked like, answering the questions of who they were, what they were doing, and why they were interested. And in this search, I argue that Jesus is presented as having women followers who were ministering to him and his disciples, as treating women (particularly ones with low societal standings) whom he meets with compassion and as agents of understanding, and as teaching an

apocalyptic message of a renewed social order in preparation of a coming kingdom, which would have been particularly appealing to women.

CHAPTER 1: THE WOMEN FOLLOWERS OF THE CANONICAL JESUS: WHO THEY WERE, WHAT THEY DID, AND WHY THEY WERE IMPORTANT

At the foundation of the study of Jesus' relationship with women, there must first be a comprehensive examination of the women who were present in his ministry. Further, within this inspection, it is critical to look not just at whom these women were, but also to consider what roles these women obtained and to review the impact they had throughout Jesus' ministry.

Luke 8:1-3, A Portrait of the Women Traveling With Jesus

When looking at the women who traveled with Jesus and what the nature of their relationship with him was like, Luke 8:1-3 is a productive passage to set the groundwork.¹ In Luke 8 the author recounts that the twelve disciples were traveling with Jesus along with “some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities...and many others who provided for them out of their resources” (Luke 8:1-3). In the first part of the description, the author lists three women who fall into the category of cured women who were following Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. Before going any further, I will examine the information about these women given throughout the canonical Gospels.

¹ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, The Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 695-698, for further discussion on Luke 8:1-3.

Mary of Magdala

According to the aforementioned passage from Luke 8, Mary of Magdala had seven demons cast out from her (Luke 8:2). Mary Magdalene is one of the most famous characters in the narrative of the Gospels in modern culture, and her relationship with Jesus has fascinated churchgoers and scholars alike for centuries. Although Mary Magdalene is important at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, it is important to note that this passage, Luke 8:1-3, is the only time Mary Magdalene is mentioned in regard to Jesus and his ministry. Further on this phenomenon, in Bart Ehrman's monograph, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, he points out that "[Mary Magdalene] is never mentioned in the book of Acts, letters of Paul...by the ten authors known as the Apostolic Fathers just after the New Testament, or by many of our earliest church fathers."² With sparse information available about who Mary Magdalene was and what her role within Jesus' ministry looked like in early Christian sources, Luke 8 is a very helpful passage. Mark 16:9 also notes that Mary Magdalene had demons cast out from her, but that verse is from a later addition from the Gospel of Mark and, I will argue, cannot be seen as an independent attestation.³ The only other piece of information from Luke 8:1-3 about Mary is that she is from the town of Magdala near the Sea of Galilee.

² Bart D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 185.

³ See Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1088, for further discussion of Mark 16:9.

Mary Magdalene often gets thrown into stories that feature a collection of unnamed women, which is why she is often labeled haphazardly as a prostitute. For example, one story that Mary Magdalene frequently gets placed into, for whatever reason, is in Luke 7 when a “sinful woman” anoints Jesus (Luke 7:36-50).⁴ As previously mentioned, though, Mary Magdalene is introduced a chapter later (Luke 8:1-3), asserting no reason to believe that the sinful woman in Luke 7 is in anyway connected to Mary Magdalene who is introduced in Luke 8.⁵ There is no logical reason for why the author of the Gospel of Luke would not draw that connection if it were true, I argue. This mistake of false attribution dates back far into Christian tradition and is not just an underground murmur around the religion, as Pope Gregory spoke about a conflated version of Mary Magdalene in a homily of his in the sixteenth century.⁶ It is also worth noting that several women named Mary appear in the Gospels, and often Mary Magdalene gets painted as a mosaic of all of the Mary’s together, which is simply illogical outside of the fact they share the same name, albeit a common one. Ehrman mentions the possibility that one of the primary reasons for the conflation of Mary’s is that “there are such sparse references to [Mary Magdalene’s] involvement with Jesus, readers of the Gospels have always inserted her into stories where her name does not occur.”⁷ Some scholars go as far as to

⁴ See Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 1059, for his discussion on the conflation of Mary Magdalen’s character.

⁵ See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 684-694, esp. 688.

⁶ Richard J. Hooper, *The Crucifixion of Mary Magdalene: The Historical Tradition of the First Apostle and the Ancient Church’s Campaign to Suppress It* (Sedona, AZ.: Sanctuary Publications, 2005), 81.

⁷ Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, 187.

argue that the conflation of Mary Magdalene's character has caused a negative impact on her apostolicity (or lack thereof influence) to this day:

Ann Graham Brock says that the conflation of Mary Magdalene with other women and the replacement in some texts of the Magdalene with Mary of Nazareth or Peter is a means by which the tradition of Mary Magdalene as a leader in the early Church has been undermined or obscure.⁸

Brock's argument is two-fold here: first, the conflation of Mary Magdalene with other women is damaging toward her apostolic witness because of the confusion around who she actually was and what she actually did. Secondly, the conflation of character could have lead early Christian writers to steer away from mentioning Mary Magdalene at all or to instead replace her with someone who more is known about, such as a (male) disciple. A noteworthy example of the latter of Brock's arguments is visible in the history of who was first to meet the resurrected Jesus. Although Mary Magdalene is at the scene in each of the four canonical Gospels, Paul challenges this tradition (knowingly or not) by claiming Cephas was the one who first met the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor 15:3-6). With two different accounts floating around in the early Christian church, I argue it is easy to see why Paul's version may have caught on. I argue, similar to Brock, that the conflation of Mary Magdalene's character had a much wider effect than just simply confusing the women named Mary – it also affected the apostolic witness of Mary Magdalene.

⁸ Allie M. Ernst, *Martha from the Margins*, BRILL, 2009, 7-8.

I note these things in regard to the conflation and confusion around Mary Magdalene as a vehicle to show that the idea of an apostolic woman was not immediately greeted very warmly. With Mary Magdalene serving as an example, a crucial figure in the Easter accounts is often turned into a prostitute or lover of Jesus with no factual evidence whatsoever.

Joanna

Next in Luke's brief statement on women in Jesus' ministry is Joanna, who is identified by the author as "the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager" (Luke 8:3). In Ben Witherington III's *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* he clarifies the importance of the inclusion of Joanna in the Lukan list:

What is especially noteworthy about her presence among Jesus' followers is that apparently she had left her home and family to become a follower and traveling companion of Jesus. Here Luke gives evidence of how the gospel breaks down class and economic divisions, as well as social barriers, and reconciles men and women from all walks of life into one community.⁹

Witherington III's comments come with theological repercussions, but that is not what is worth highlighting from this passage. The distinction to be made here is between the characters of Mary Magdalene and Joanna and their social backgrounds. Joanna – the

⁹ Ben Witherington, III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus' Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in his Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 116-117.

wife of a man who was in Herod's inner circle – and Mary Magdalene – a woman from a small town who had demons cast out from her – were walking together in Jesus' ministry. Both of them, from completely different walks of life, were attracted enough to Jesus that they decided to follow him. Although the information known about Joanna and Mary Magdalene is fairly miniscule, this stark contrast in their socio-economic status does give insight into the possible diversity of women active in Jesus' ministry. Joanna's presumed higher financial status also gives credence to the possibility of women being financial donors to the ministry, as seen in Luke 8:3 when the Gospel author notes that the women "provided for them out of their resources." Joanna is only mentioned once more, during Luke's resurrection account (Luke 24:10). In his *Introduction, Translation, and Notes of the Gospel According to Luke*, Joseph A. Fitzmyer adds that the addition of Joanna, and her husband's role within Herod's hierarchy, "suggest that Jesus' influence and preaching was reaching even to high places."¹⁰

Susanna

The final woman mentioned in this passage from Luke 8 is Susanna, who is not given a modifier attached to her name, unlike Mary Magdalene and Joanna. Not only is she denied a modifier, but she is also never mentioned in the other canonical Gospel accounts, and therefore no other information about her, her role, or her societal standing is known.

¹⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 698.

‘Many Others’

Along with the three women specifically mentioned by the author there are “many others” who “provided for them out of their means” (Luke 8:1-3). The phrase “many others” is vague and leaves no clear impression on just how dominant women were in number or importance in Jesus’ ministry. But when completing revisionist history and looking through the letters of Paul (excluding the Pastorals), Wayne Meeks compiled a list of nearly 80 people who were described as being participants in the early Christian movement and nearly one-fifth of them were women.¹¹ Ross Shepard Kraemer comments on this finding:

...it is by now a well-demonstrated historical principle that women are systematically underrepresented in virtually all historical sources, we should by no means infer that this represents the proportion of women to men in these churches accurately.¹²

With Meeks’ breakdown of gender in the early Christian movement in mind and Kraemer’s caveat on the possible underrepresentation of women in sources, Witherington III adds there is “little reason to question the authenticity of the information that women traveled and served Jesus and the disciples...”¹³

¹¹ See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), for further reading.

¹² Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women’s Religions Among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1994), 135.

¹³ Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 114.

Shepard Kraemer also draws a distinction about how women are introduced in the Gospel texts. Unlike what may have been expected at the time, where women would have been constantly introduced in regard to their role to other males (mother of, wife of, daughter of), that is rarely the case in the canonical Gospel accounts. Of the three women mentioned in Luke 8, only Joanna, who is introduced as the “wife of Chuza...” is given a typical modifier. While Shepard Kraemer is more concerned with the possibility of the women followers of Jesus’ not fitting into traditional roles of wife, mother and daughter, her point is still worth bringing to light.

Remarkably few women in the early Jesus movement appear to conform to the most socially acceptable categories of virgin daughter, respectable wife, and mother of legitimate children. Frequently, they are anomalous not merely by virtue of their gender, but also by additional marginal traits, often specific to women. If the women who followed Jesus and who were members of the earliest communities after his death had living husbands, virtually nothing in the gospel traditions attests to this.¹⁴

Luke 8:1-3 does give a brief look into Jesus’ relationship with his women followers, but it also serves in explaining their role. For that reason I will come back to this passage later in the chapter, but now, I will focus on a couple more critical women characters in Jesus’ life. Although it is not insinuated that the following women were the “many others” that the author of the Gospel of Luke is referencing, Mary, the Mother of

¹⁴ Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 133.

Jesus, and sisters Martha and Mary, are all well known for their presence throughout the canonical Gospels.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Though only two of the four canonical Gospels (Matthew and Luke) relay an infancy narrative, all four do mention Mary in some form or fashion. Instead of focusing on the accounts that Mary is most known for (the infancy narratives), I will instead first hone in on the times that Mary appears in the canonical Gospels during Jesus' ministry and then explain why Mary is presented in the light that she is.

Starting with the Gospel of Mark, Mary is mentioned a few times – never in a very flattering manner. After a series of run-ins with the Jewish scribes and Pharisees, Jesus' family finds out about what he has been up to, and his family (including Mary) “went out to restrain him,” and said, “he is out of his mind” (Mark 3:20). Almost a dozen verses later, after Mark presents Jesus discussing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, Jesus' “mothers and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him” (Mark 3:31). The crowd tells Jesus that they are outside calling for him, and he replies, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” then, looking at the crowd he replies, “Here are my mother and brothers” (Mark 3:34-35).¹⁵

Later, in Mark 6, when Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, the people listening ask, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” Mark then says the crowd “took offense to him” (Mark 6:3).

¹⁵ See Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 269-288; esp. 285-286.

In Mark's crucifixion account he mentions that "Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses" was there, which lines up with the passage from Mark 6. But this begs the question of why the Gospel author would say that Mary was the mother of two of Jesus' brothers, but not Jesus himself (Mark 15:40-41).¹⁶ Marcus notes that "it would be extraordinary, however, for Mark to identify this Mary through her sons James and Joses rather than Jesus..."¹⁷ I will touch on why the author could have made this decision a little later.

In the Gospel of John, Mary appears only once during Jesus' ministry and also at the resurrection. Her one appearance in John brings a bit of controversy between her and her son, as well. After John's prologue introduces readers to the divine nature of his Jesus, the second chapter illustrates the first "sign" Jesus performs. Jesus was at a wedding at Cana in Galilee "and the mother of Jesus was there" and after the wine runs out, Mary tells Jesus there is no wine, and Jesus reacts harshly: "Woman, what concern is that have to you and me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:2-3). What is odd about this story, though, is that Mary tells the disciples to "do whatever he tells you" and moments later Jesus turns the water into wine (John 2:5). An argument can be made that this was Mary showing her maternal authority over Jesus, as she does not rebuke him but instead simply tells his disciples to listen to him preemptively as if she knows exactly what he is going to do. Either way, again, there is another canonical account of what appears to be a rocky relationship between Jesus and his mother.

In Matthew and Luke's respective Gospels the introductory chapters are spent explaining the divine birth of Jesus, depicting Mary as God's instrument for the

¹⁶ Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 1060.

deliverance of Jesus.¹⁸ Outside of the infancy narratives, Matthew and Luke both relay the same two Markan stories discussed previously, but with some redaction. Matthew's Gospel keeps the stories almost completely intact, but Luke's Gospel softens the blow of Jesus' words. Most notably, Jesus says, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it," omitting the Markan quote of "Who are my mother and brothers?" (Luke 8:19-21, Mark 3:32). Both Matthew and Luke, however, omitted the story in Mark 3 involving Jesus' family claiming he was out of his mind. This, I argue, shows that the early Gospel writers are cognizant of the reflection that the mother-son relationship gives off in Mark and are trying to shift the story around to ease the tension.

Concluding on Jesus' relationship with his mother, I argue that the characterization of Mary throughout Jesus' ministry speaks less to his treatment toward women and more about the role of women within his greater movement. The synoptic instances involve a point being made about Jesus breaking familial rules and regulations and emphasizing the spiritual brother and sisterhood available instead. Marcus comments on one example of this – when Jesus says the crowd are his true brothers and sisters (Mark 3:34-35) – in his *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* of Mark 1-8 when he notes, "The clear implication is that this crowd is made up of such obedient doers and that they belong to Jesus' true family...Christian traditions looked forward to the restoration of the family as a sign of the end-times..."¹⁹ I argue that inside of these conflict stories between Jesus and his mother it is important to see that Jesus is not breaking the Jewish law of not honoring his mother, he is instead, adding an element to

¹⁸ See William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 199.

¹⁹ Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 286.

the law. This is seen in Luke 14:26 when Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” Ross Shepard Kraemer argues that Jesus was warning his followers that at the very least they must “subordinate [family] ties to their loyalty and love for Jesus.”²⁰ Much like Jesus delivers several antithetical statements in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew that called for an additional layer to the law, so, too, in Jesus’ treatment of his mother is this theme present.²¹ This is seen when Jesus notes, “For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). Further, in Matthew 10:37 Jesus says, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...” In both of these examples, Jesus is not saying that people should not honor one’s father and mother or love their sons and daughters, but rather arguing that there is something more important – one’s love for Jesus and one’s treatment of spiritual family.

Instead of emphasizing his physical mother, Jesus is advocating for honoring the spiritual family as well. Marcus sees this theme as a possible answer for the confusion around which Mary was at the crucifixion, as well: “The Markan Jesus had identified his real mother as the one who does the will of God rather than his physical one (3:31-35)...so Mark may be trying to deemphasize physical relationships and to keep the focus on *divine* sonship...”²²

²⁰ Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 138.

²¹ See Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 505-568, for further reading on Jesus’ antithetical statements.

²² Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 1060.

The canonical Gospels portrayal of Jesus and Mary is undoubtedly full of what appears to be conflict, but at its core depicts a relationship that advocates for an honoring of family members by blood, while calling for a deeper love of Jesus and the “new family” that is spiritual.²³

Martha and Mary

The final women who often are placed within Jesus’ ministry are Martha and Mary. Although their two appearances in the canonical Gospels (Luke 10, John 11-12) do not depict the sisters as being involved in the daily, traveling aspect of Jesus’ ministry, the Johannine tradition says the sisters, and their brother Lazarus, were loved by Jesus (John 11:5). The Gospel of John also relays an account where Jesus weeps about the death of Lazarus, relaying an understood bond between Jesus and this family (John 11:35). The two stories Martha and Mary appear in have invoked a guttural response from modern day protestant Christians who tend to slight Martha for being the sister who is working rather than enjoying Jesus’ presence and learning, as Mary does. In Luke 10 Jesus tells Martha – who was distracted by her many tasks – that she is “worried...by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42). Fitzmyer notes that Mary is presented as “the perfect disciple” and that “Luke... does not hesitate to depict a woman as a disciple sitting at Jesus’ feet; this goes beyond (Luke) 8:2-3.”²⁴ Fitzmyer’s point that Mary’s presentation as a disciple-like figure is one step further than how women are presented in Luke 8:2-3 is one I completely agree with. While the women in Luke 8:2-3 are presented

²³ Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 286.

²⁴ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 892.

as traveling and providing for Jesus and his disciples, Mary is affirmed for listening and learning from Jesus. On the other hand Martha is told that her preparation is not as good as Mary's listening, which indicates, I argue, that the women in Jesus' ministry were doing more than just table service.

In Allie Ernst's monograph *Martha from the Margins*, Ernst takes a deep dive into perceptions (both ancient and modern) of Martha (and Mary, comparatively) and their role within early Christian tradition. Instead of discussing the perceptions of these women and their actions in the sermons that are often preached today, I would rather glean from the text on their impact in Jesus' ministry. In Mary Rose D'Angelo's book *Women Partners in the New Testament* she extends an argument that's groundwork was laid by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. D'Angelo suggests that Martha and Mary form, "A missionary couple, a pair like Paul and Sosthenes. As Paul designated himself 'apostle' and Sosthenes 'brother' (*adelphos*; 1 Cor 1:1), so Martha was designated *diakonos* and Mary 'sister' (*adelphe*)."²⁵ Her textual argument does have flaws, though, as Ernst points out. The term *διακονία* is never given to Martha, but instead its verb form — *διακονεῖν* — is used as an action for her. To build off Ernst's argument, in English rather than Greek, I can "sing" songs all day long but not be call myself a "singer." The argument follows that just because Martha and Mary are described as ministering — or some iteration of *διακονεῖν* — they are never referred to specifically as a *διακονία* — a minister. This term, "*διακονία*," and its variations, are foundational for discussion of the words used by the canonical authors to explain what Jesus' women followers were doing.

²⁵ D'Angelo, Mary Rose, "Women Partners in the New Testament," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6, no. 1 (1990), 78.

Roles of Women Within Jesus' Ministry

Turning to the roles that these women served in Jesus' ministry, it is first important to clarify that it was both "uncommon" and "unknown" for women at this time to travel with rabbis, but not that strange for women to offer financial support through "money, property, or foodstuffs."²⁶ Fitzmyer argues that "what the episode of [Luke] 8:1-3 does indicate...is a recollection about Jesus which differed radically from the usual understanding of women's role in contemporary Judaism."²⁷ Fitzmyer asserts that Jesus' relationship with women was much more than providing table service.

In the Luke 8 passage the phrase which is used to describe their role: "they provided for them out of their own means," uses the Greek word previously mentioned, διακονεῖν, which is used (in some variation) 32 times in the New Testament and translates in several different fashions ranging as wide as a ministerial context and a food preparation context.²⁸

διακονεῖν

²⁶ Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 118.

²⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 697.

²⁸ Thayer and Smith, "Greek Lexicon Entry for Diakonia," *The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon*.

Further, on the Greek διακονεῖν, Fitzmyer translates the phrase to mean, “who were serving them” and adds that it is “not being restricted to table service.”²⁹ In Ernst’s extensive research on the word — taking up an entire chapter in her book— she argues that “...traditional readings have been subject to a gender bias which more readily attributes women’s διακονία to a meaning related with table service and men’s διακονία to a meaning related with commissioned sending.”³⁰ With that in mind, Ernst tries to trace the roots of the word into Pauline literature and finds that διακονία, “served Christian writers such as Paul in emphasizing not their humility and servant status, but their authenticity as mediators of the divine word and commissioned agents of God.”³¹ Ernst’s point here is crucial for understanding the problem behind the translation of the word: the word is being translated drastically different depending on the gender of the subject. For Paul, for example, διακονία seems to readily translate to a divinely inspired minister and for women, more often than not, it is frequently used in times of food preparation, seen in the Johannine story of Marth and Mary. The perplexity behind why the word would be translated one way for a male follower of Jesus, another way for a woman follower, and an even more complex way for Paul, the apostle, means that context is crucial in translation. Ernst extensively cites John Collins, who himself has authored an entire book on διακονία. Collins, too, argues that context is an important factor to best understand the original intention of the author’s use of διακονία.³² Ernst concludes her research of διακονία by saying that interpretations of the word “highlight

²⁹ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 698.

³⁰ Ernst, *Martha From the Margins*, 181.

³¹ Ernst, *Martha From the Margins*, 179.

³² See John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

competing frameworks for conceptualizing the early Church...much meaning must be inferred by filling in the gaps...”³³ I am not arguing that the term *διακονία* was never intended to represent a women ministering in a household or table context, rather I am arguing that it without a doubt was not always intended to represent that. There are certainly cases where *διακονία* was intended to depict a woman who was ministering through table service, but the gender bias often seen in the interpretation creates a problem when men and women’s “ministering” are always translated differently.

It seems clear that the extent and capacity in which women were serving rests in large part on the interpretation of *διακονία*. I agree with the conclusion Fitzmyer reaches: this term does not restrict the role of women to table service and also concur with the thought process of many scholars, including Ernst and Schüssler Fiorenza, that the term’s translation (in the New Testament specifically) has been colored through traditional gender roles, leading to a translation that favors men as ministering in a traditional context and women as table serving.

“Disciples”

There are simply not enough stories, mentions, or accounts of women within Jesus’ ministry to be able to wholeheartedly argue that these women walking alongside Jesus were his financial donors (outside of Luke 8:1-3) or that they were called “disciples.” However, Schüssler Fiorenza discusses at great length the nuances and possible biases in translation in the New Testament, including the word “disciples.” Her argument centers around the observation that some translators use the Greek masculine plural to often include men and women in some Biblical passages, yet also deduce that

³³ Ernst, *Martha From the Margins*, 184.

“the disciples” (in the masculine plural form) only refers to men. She goes on to further say, in light of the translation of “disciples,” that “at crucial points of the narrative, women emerge as exemplary disciples and apostolic witnesses.”³⁴ So not only is translation a problem, again, but Schüssler Fiorenza is also arguing that women act as “disciples” throughout the ministry of Jesus. In the aforementioned Lukan passage, however, the author notes that the twelve (all-men) disciples were traveling with Jesus along with some women, but there is no indication that they are held in the same regard or status as the men in Jesus’ ministry.

I conclude that although the women followers of Jesus were not necessarily on an equal footing with the twelve disciples when it comes to their role, I argue they were actively ministering (both spiritually and in a more traditional household context) to Jesus and the disciples. I also argue it is critical to keep in mind Schüssler Fiorenza’s discussion of the gender bias that is often done in the translation of masculine plural Greek words to include (or not include) females depending on the word.

Women at the Tomb

Although in the Canonical Gospels there are no passages describing one of Jesus’ women followers teaching or leading others, they do play a crucial role in arguably the most important part of Jesus’ life for the Christian church – the resurrection.

³⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: Student Christian Movement Press (SCM Press), 1983), 326.

First, foundationally, the fact that all four canonical Gospel accounts find women at the tomb meeting the resurrected Jesus rests on the trust that the (likely) men authors of the Gospels had in the witness of these women. Throughout the canonical Gospels there are very few things that all four authors agree on, but one of them is that women were at the empty tomb. There is an argument to be made that this speaks to the legitimacy or historicity of the event, but I find that it more importantly speaks to the trust of the women's witness. As Allison and Davies put it, women "lend both credibility and continuity to the story by serving as eyewitnesses to the kerygmatic triad: Jesus died, was buried, was raised."³⁵ Further, Ehrman notes, "I think we have secure historical data to suggest that Mary Magdalene was the first to discover and proclaim the resurrection of Jesus...It is not at all farfetched to claim that Mary was the founder of Christianity."³⁶ It is apparent that this would be rather groundbreaking or perception shattering to some early readers of these Gospels.

Further, the resurrected Jesus commissions Mary Magdalene (in both John and Mark) to go and tell the disciples of his resurrection (Matthew 28:10, John 20:17). On the topic of Mary as the first to proclaim the risen Jesus, Ehrman says, "Technically speaking, Christianity could not begin until someone proclaimed Jesus raised from the dead. If so...Mary really is the one who started Christianity."³⁷ Now, logically, if women were at the tomb then it makes sense for them to be the first to be commissioned to go and tell. However, from a wider-scale, the fact that the women are the first to know of the

³⁵ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 367.

³⁶ Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, 229.

³⁷ Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, 256.

resurrected Jesus and sent to tell the men is a notable flip of the script. It is not Peter or the beloved disciple, rather it is a group of women who had been following and ministering to Jesus and the twelve disciples who were the first to discover and tell the εὐαγγέλιον – the gospel, or good news – to others. Even though little to no information has been given on some of the women who are present at the resurrection in the canonical accounts, the story still rests on them – not the twelve, men, disciples. This trust in women, and moreover Mary Magdalene's, witness in front of a backdrop of women's cultural status and the overall narrative of the Gospels is crucial to understand and cannot be overstated.

‘Apostola Apostolorum’

Who was at the tomb differs from account to account, but it is worth mentioning the overlap and highlighting the differences. Mary Magdalene is at the tomb in each of the canonical Gospels. Mary Magdalene's inclusion in all four has been a very noteworthy moment for many scholars. Schüssler Fiorenza, along with other scholars such as the aforementioned D'Angelo, have argued the resurrection appearance means a great deal for Mary Magdalene's apostolic authority:

The last woman to appear in the Fourth Gospel is Mary Magdalene who was also mentioned as standing under the cross of Jesus. She not only discovers the empty tomb but is also the first to receive a resurrection appearance. Thus in a double sense she becomes the *apostola apostolorum*, the apostle of apostles.³⁸

³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 332.

Ehrman makes note that Mary Magdalene is recorded as an apostle by some early Christian writers, but also in the New Testament. One example of this is found in the Gospel of John, where Jesus “commissions her to tell the disciples that he is about to ascend to heaven, and she does as she is told. Here Mary is the first to be commissioned to proclaim the resurrection. In this account, at least, Mary is the first apostle.”³⁹ There may not have been any women disciples, but as Ehrman and Schüssler Fiorenza note, the first apostle was a woman.

The Resurrection in Mark

It is impossible to discuss the women and the resurrection without noting the original Markan Easter account. After going to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body the women see “a young man dressed in a white robe,” who tells the women that Jesus has risen (Mark 16:2). In 16:8, the final verse of the Gospel (not counting the additional verses added later), the women “went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”⁴⁰ This, obviously, is much different than what is preached on Easter Sunday’s across the globe. I simply want to point out that the other two synoptic Gospels, and John in its own right, change this ending rather dramatically. A later scribe changes the original ending of Mark, as well. In his redactional study of the resurrection accounts, Grant Osborne notes, “The main redaction in verse 8 is his added motifs of joy and obedience. Critics who affirm the short ending (16:8) of Mark say Matthew tried to alter that somber ending with his own

³⁹ Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene*, 253.

⁴⁰ See Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 1088.

additions in 28:8, but that view hardly seems necessary.”⁴¹ Without getting into the longer ending of Mark or Markan priority, I just want to note a possible literary function here that the author of Mark could be using by ending his Gospel the way that he does. By no means does this discount the fact that it ends with women fleeing, but nonetheless Ehrman gives insight into a possible rationale:

Mark makes a special point throughout his narrative that the male disciples never understand who Jesus is. Despite all his miracles, despite all his teachings, despite everything they see him do and say, they never ‘get it.’ And so at the end of the Gospel, who learns that Jesus has not stayed dead but has been raised? The women. Not the male disciples... This is all consistent with Mark’s view and with what he is trying to do from a literary standpoint.⁴²

It is often forgotten that the authors of the Gospels were real people writing in real time to real communities in real places, each bringing their own personal style and context to the table when penning the gospel. I would argue that it is also fair to say that the author of the Gospel of Mark did not anticipate his words being read nearly 2,000 years later. Therefore, the original ending of Mark may not make sense to modern day readers, but when reading the resurrection account in light of the entire Gospel of Mark, it seems very fitting, which is why Ehrman’s point is worth mentioning. The Gospel of Mark is unique in many ways – most notably the motif of the *messianic secret* and his

⁴¹ Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984).

⁴² Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), 167-168.

Easter account – both of which speak to this larger, intentional, literary enigma that the author uses throughout the Gospel.

With that being said, the mosaic generally painted of the resurrection story involves women at the tomb, but the emphasis is less on *which* women it is and more on the fact that they are the women followers of Jesus, and not the twelve disciples. After discussing what type of women were traveling with Jesus and what their roles looked like, I argue that the canonical tradition of Jesus appearing to women is the very foundation for arguing that women played a critical role in Jesus' ministry. It seems implausible that the canonical Jesus would appear to a few women whom he barely knew or cared about. Rather, the canonical Jesus' resurrection appearance to the women not only implies a deep bond between them, but also a level of trust in the women's ability to act as apostles – or messengers – to his other friends, the disciples. This, I argue, speaks not just to the role of women in the resurrection accounts of Jesus, but also to the larger role these women played throughout Jesus' ministry.

Through a review of the Canonical Gospels' depiction of Jesus' relationship with his women followers, I argue that these women came from all walks of life – as seen by the modifiers given in Luke 8:1-3, were ministering to Jesus and his disciples – both spiritually and more than likely in a traditional household context, and played a pivotal role as apostolic figures at canonical Jesus' resurrection.

CHAPTER 2: THE NAMELESS WOMEN THREE STORIES OF WOMEN WHOM JESUS MEETS

While many of the women discussed in the first chapter are well-known, foundational figures in Christianity, there are nearly a dozen women throughout the canonical Gospels whom Jesus meets that have also become familiar characters within the Christian tradition. In the first chapter I discussed women who were traveling companions of Jesus providing for and ministering alongside him. In this chapter, I will thoroughly examine three women whom Jesus meets during his public ministry: one unique to the Gospel of John, one found in each of the synoptic Gospels, and the other found in all four canonical Gospels. I believe this approach will be the most comprehensive of the options available for tackling how the canonical Jesus dealt with women whom he met during his travels in one brief chapter.

Along with splitting up the stories by where they are found throughout the canonical Gospels, I intend to draw distinctions unique to each story about what the authors are trying to portray about Jesus and the women. First, from the Gospel of John, I will examine the Samaritan woman at the well and her role as an apostolic-like figure, spreading the message of Jesus to the rest of her community. Then, from the synoptic Gospels, I will discuss the story of the hemorrhaging woman and Jesus' lack of concern for purity laws and societal pressure during his interaction with her. Finally, from all four canonical Gospels, I will consider the accounts of the woman who anoints Jesus and the contrast presented between the anointing woman and the disciples in their understanding of who Jesus is.

I would like to make a few notes about my procedure before continuing. It would be tempting to spend a portion of this chapter studying the redactions made by the Gospel authors in

their recounting of the same story (in the case of the hemorrhaging woman and the anointing woman). That, however, is not my intention. I will address redactions that I find pertinent to the theme of each woman's story, but will not, for instance, get into the differences in syntax throughout the accounts of Jesus' anointing. This chapter is intended to detail how three stories from varied canonical traditions depict Jesus' treatment of women whom he met in his ministry, which will in turn come at the expense of delving deeper into the fine point redactions the Gospel authors made when writing their respective accounts.

While in the first chapter I set out to showcase women as friends and partners walking alongside Jesus in his ministry, this chapter is intended to prove that the women whom Jesus met during his ministry – who would have been deemed as unclean and outcasts by onlookers – were depicted as understanding Jesus and his fate against the backdrop of the aloof disciples.

The Samaritan Woman at the Well

The Johannine story of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well is often prominently noted because of the political boundaries Jesus is crossing by talking with a Samaritan. Often secondary to the conversation being with a Samaritan is that Jesus was talking with a woman. This is apparent in John 4:9 when the author of the Gospel of John uses what is translated into English as a parenthetical statement to explain why the woman was taken aback by Jesus' request for water: "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" or in other translations, "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans." The author felt the need to clarify the conversation was strange because of the strife between Jews and Samaritans not because it was a man and woman. In Martinus C. De Boer's book about women (and men by comparison) in the

Gospel of John, he notes this about the characterization of the woman (italics are his): “She is not the Samaritan *woman* but the woman *Samaritan*.”¹ Whether the woman should be described as the Samaritan woman or the woman Samaritan, the amalgamation of the two features is noteworthy. This woman’s two noted qualities make her the perfect representation of someone that Jesus is least expected to talk to, I argue. Further, in David Daube’s study of John 4, he says “the combination of Samaritan and woman takes the provocativeness of the conversation to a whole new level,” and references rabbinic literature that calls “the daughters of Samaritans...menstruants from their cradle.”² What hopefully comes through in Daube’s explanation of the “provocativeness of the conversation” is that Samaritan women never even had a chance to earn their purity. It is something they are born into, “from their cradle.”³ The ethnic makeup of the woman is how she is identified by the author, which makes it worth noting to help give a comprehensive look into the context of what is at stake in this conversation.

Jesus’ Relationship with Samaritans Throughout the Canonical Gospels

Throughout the canonical Gospels, Jesus’ dealings with Samaritans are only mentioned a few times: once in the Gospel of Matthew and the other times in the Gospel of Luke. The only mention of Samaritans in the Gospel of Matthew comes in Matthew 10:5 when Jesus instructed the disciples, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In Luke 9:52-53 the author recounts a Samaritan village rejecting Jesus passing through. When the disciples tell Jesus he has been prohibited from entering they ask him if he wants them to “tell fire to come down from heaven and consume

¹ Martinus C. de Boer, John 4:27: “Women (and men) in the Gospel and Community of John,” in *Women in the Biblical Tradition* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 214.

² David Daube, “Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: The Meaning of συγχράομαι,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69, no. 2 (June 1950): The Society of Biblical Literature, 137.

³ See Mishnah Niddah 4.1

them (the Samaritans),” and Jesus “turned and rebuked them (the disciples).” Later in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is passing along between Samaria and Galilee when he cleanses ten lepers in a village. After being healed, one of the men “turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his feet at Jesus’ feet giving him thanks” (Luke 17:15-16). The author abruptly stops the scene with a brief statement: “Now he was a Samaritan.” This, however, does not stop Jesus, as he asks where the other nine men were and then blesses the Samaritan man who came back to thank him. Aside from these events in Jesus’ ministry, there is one more major canonical narrative that includes Samaritans. Often coined “The Good Samaritan,” one of Jesus’ most known parables, comes after a lawyer asks Jesus about whom his neighbor is. Jesus replies by telling a story where a priest and Levite pass by a man on the road left for dead, and it is the Samaritan who heals his wounds and takes him to an inn – serving as the exemplary neighbor (Luke 10:25-37).

I note these other instances of Samaritans in the canonical Gospels because although there is not another attestation of this particular story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, it is fair to say the stories of Samaritans in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke paint a picture of a checkered relationship between Jesus’ ministry and the Samaritans. It is odd, though, that Matthew and Luke’s respective stories about Samaritans are completely different. In Matthew, Jesus commands the disciples not to enter their villages (Matthew 10:5), and in Luke Jesus himself enters a village that contains at least one Samaritan (Luke 17:15-16) and tells a parable where the Samaritan is the correct arbiter of loving one’s neighbor (Luke 10:25-37). This bit of context hopefully shines light on the cultural line in the sand that Jesus is narrowly walking as he approaches the Samaritan woman at the well.

The Disciples ‘Marveled’

It is important to note the objection of the disciples when they return to the well from going to get food (John 4:8, 4:31). When the disciples return from their trip to the city, they “marveled that he was talking with a woman” (John 4:27). The text then depicts the disciples confused about how to address Jesus after seeing him talking with the woman, so they say nothing: “But no one said ‘What do you seek?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’ and then the woman left her jar and went back into the city” (John 4:27). Up to this point in the Gospel of John the only woman Jesus has talked to was his mother at the wedding at Cana (John 2), so it is hypothetically possible that the newly called disciples have never seen Jesus speak with a woman. De Boer is interested in the amazement of the disciples and asks a question that gets to the heart of the issue:

Why are the disciples as “amazed” that Jesus is speaking with a woman? Is Jesus’ behavior primarily in collision with their presumed cultural-religious assumptions and conditioning or is it in collision with their presumed previous experience of Jesus himself?⁴

De Boer’s inquiry speaks to the possibility that early on in Jesus’ ministry the disciples were still clinging to many of their “presumed cultural-religious assumptions” and had not acclimated to the beliefs and worldview of Jesus. Essentially, Jesus’ lifestyle is vastly different than how they have been living or been taught to live, and the disciples have not quite acclimated to seeing the world as Jesus does. De Boer also gives another option, which is that this

⁴De Boer, *Women (and men) in the Gospel and Community of John*, 223.

interaction is colliding with “their presumed previous examples of Jesus himself.”⁵ This could mean, as I have previously mentioned, that Jesus at this point in the Gospel of John has only spoken with one woman, his mother, and they have never seen him talk to other women. On the other hand it could be that there are previous examples of Jesus making a cognizant decision to not talk to women in front of his disciples. De Boer’s question does not have a clear cut answer, but I would argue for a reading that allows room for the possibility of both the disciples clinging to their previous cultural-religious assumptions and the possibility that the disciples have never seen Jesus speak to a woman (aside from his mother) at this point. Understanding both options as possibilities lends itself to an interpretation which allows the disciples’ shock to be legitimate bewilderment of a man speaking to a woman one-on-one because of those presumed cultural-religious assumptions or to be genuine confusion because they had never seen Jesus not speak to a woman who was not his mother. Either way, I do not think their reaction is because of Jesus’ past behavior being not cordial toward women.

Jesus’ Living Water and the Samaritan Woman’s Marriages

The heart of the conversation that Jesus and the Samaritan woman had dealt with Jesus speaking about the “living water” that he has to offer, compared to the physical water that the woman expects Jesus to be interested in drawing from the well. This is highlighted in verses 13-14 when Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.” This leads to the woman asking for this so-called living water so that she “will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water” (John 4:15). And when the Samaritan woman departs from Jesus she “leaves her water jar,” seemingly disinterested in the physical water and enthralled by Jesus’ “living water” to go

⁵ De Boer, *Women (and men) in the Gospel and Community of John*, 224.

into the town to tell her community what she has learned. What is most notable about the conversation the pair has, though, for the purposes of this chapter, is when Jesus tells the woman to “Go, call your husband, and come here” (John 4:16). The woman replies that she has no husband, and Jesus in turn recounts that he knows she does not, for she has had five. In Ben Witherington III’s *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, he explains why Jesus’ awareness of her previous five husbands may add an extra layer to the story:

In the context of Judaism it was not the custom to have more than three marriages in a lifetime – legally, any number might be admissible, but morally more than three would be suspect...If this woman was living with a man other than her husband, she would be ritually unclean, yet Jesus shows no signs of maintaining the distinctions of clean and unclean. He asks for a drink and continues to pursue His discussion so that she may believe, thus violating the well-known Jewish warning against speaking to a woman (especially a known harlot) in public.⁶

Witherington III is arguing that not only would the woman have been traditionally degraded for her ethnicity and gender, but also because of some choices she has made. Similarly, Janeth Day notes the Samaritan woman’s number of husbands and societal status could have also affected her ability to “convert” or explain what just happened to her to the people when she returns to her village. Day first clarifies that she thinks the questioning of her past life was not a negative quip from Jesus intended to show his knowledge or power over her, but instead a way to

⁶ Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in his Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 60.

“express[ing] compassion and concern for the suffering she has endured and the hardships she has experienced.”⁷ Day then turns to the question of if the woman’s past relationships and marital status would have affected her witness.

Had she been a loose woman with a reputation of sinfulness, I question whether she would have gotten the same response. People would more likely have jeered and mocked her, incredulous that such a person would claim to have a positive encounter with a man of God.⁸

I do not disagree with Day’s assessment that it is possible that the woman’s marital status is a factor that could have affected the way her community trusted what she had to say when she returned from her meeting with Jesus. But I simply do not see the basis for this in the text itself. Instead, the Gospel of John recounts, “many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39).

‘Because of the Woman’s Testimony’

I will now turn to John’s full explanation of what happens when the woman returns to the village to explain her interaction with Jesus. Although the Samaritans believe the woman, some of them wanted to see Jesus in the flesh before they called him the “savior of the world.”

⁷ Janeth Norfleete Day, *The Woman at the Well: Interpretation of John 4:1-42 In Retrospect and Prospect* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 171-172.

⁸ Day, *The Woman at the Well*, 175.

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

The first verse in this passage (John 4:39) says that upon returning and explaining that Jesus knew everything about her, the Samaritan woman made many of the people in the city "believe in him." It is important to remember this verse as the story progresses because by the end of this series of verses the people "no longer believe because of what you [the woman] said." John 4:39 explicitly says that some of the Samaritans came to believe because of the woman's word. The rest who come to believe in Jesus as the savior, it says in the next verse, sought Jesus out to see him for themselves. But, again, it is worth noting that even these people who are going to find Jesus are doing so on the basis of the word of the woman. I argue it is the curiosity of the Samaritans who have recently heard about Jesus and his "living water" he is offering that leads them to seek out Jesus, himself, to learn more – not because they do not trust the woman's word. Later in the passage the Gospel writer says, "...many more believed because of his [Jesus'] word." Again, there is an argument to be made this is because the people did not believe the woman and had to see Jesus for themselves, but I want to push back on this. I argue there were plenty of people who were skeptical about if they even wanted what Jesus had to offer and did not pay attention to the woman or what she had to say. As Day argues, perhaps this is because of the woman's societal status. So after hearing all of the commotion about Jesus, they find him,

spend two days with him – a Jewish man who was not scared of the customs that forbade him from being with them – and more people decided that they were interested in what Jesus was talking about. This does not take away from the witness of the Samaritan woman. In fact, it is all because of the Samaritan woman. Without her, the conversations between Jesus and the Samaritans in her community would have never taken place. My thought process is affirmed, in my opinion, by the final verse of this narrative where “they” tell the woman that they now believe not because of her, but because “we have heard for ourselves.” After a first reading it may seem that this is some type of retort toward the woman and her witness, but I argue that this statement is the others confirming what she has done, giving thanks, and pointing out the new strength they have found since meeting Jesus in the flesh instead of just through the woman’s words.

The Dichotomy of the Disciples and the Samaritan Woman

With the woman as the foundation for the Samaritan community, De Boer takes a look at how the woman compares to the (men) disciples. Just as the woman spreads the word to her friends, the (men) disciples are supposed to do as well.

The woman of Samaria grows in faith and brings others to Jesus just as the men disciples do at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Her Samaritan compatriots come to believe ‘on account of the woman’s word,’ just as others, according to (John) 17:20, will come to believe through the word of the (presumably) men disciples.⁹

⁹ De Boer, *Women (and men) in the Gospel and Community of John*, 209.

In his analysis of John 4, Witherington III notes that the Gospel author “contrasts the woman who leaves her water jug forsaking her original purpose at the well to go into town and speak about Jesus, with the disciples who left Jesus to find mere physical sustenance.”¹⁰

What both De Boer and Witherington III are pointing to is very important to the theme I am attempting to draw out of this story. Not only is this woman an unlikely suspect to be the target of Jesus’ “living water” that he has to offer, but she is also a messenger to the rest of her community. Further, when examined next to the men disciples there seems to be a clear dichotomy presented about the woman’s trust, faith, and actions, compared to the seemingly ignorant disciples who can not figure out why Jesus is talking to a woman or why Jesus will not eat what they have brought him.

While there are a myriad of things that can be drawn from this story to make a point about what Jesus’ relationships with women looked like, the most interesting to me is the role she plays in converting her community. It is undoubtedly worth pointing out what is at stake with a Jewish man and Samaritan woman talking. So, too, is it worth discussing the conversation itself about “living water” and Jesus’ knowledge of the woman’s divorces. But what really speaks the strongest to the role the character of the Samaritan woman plays in the grander narrative is her apostolic-like witness. Strong’s Greek dictionary defines the word apostle – ἀπόστολος – as “a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders.”¹¹ Although Jesus never commissions or specifically “sends forth with orders” the Samaritan woman as he does post-resurrection to the women at the tomb, the Samaritan woman acts as a messenger for the good news that she has learned from Jesus and leads her community to believe that Jesus is “the savior of the world” in

¹⁰ Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 60.

¹¹ Thayer and Smith, "Greek Lexicon entry for Apostolos," The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon.

large part because of the woman's original testimony. I argue that the steps the Samaritan woman takes upon leaving Jesus is in line with what Jesus expected his disciples to do when he tells them before his ascension to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). This story, at its core, depicts Jesus as someone who viewed women, not just men, as a vehicle for his message.

The Hemorrhaging Woman

Unlike the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman found in the Gospel of John, Jesus' healing of the hemorrhaging woman is a miracle story found in each of the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34, Luke 8:43–48). Jesus does not have a long conversation with the woman about what he has to offer her, but instead literally bumps into this woman on the road. The synoptic miracle is sandwiched between an exorcism and the raising of the daughter of Jarius. While Jesus is traveling to Jarius' house to see his dying (or dead, according to Matthew's account) daughter, the instance with the hemorrhaging woman takes place.

A State of Impurity

The Synoptic story indicates that while Jesus was walking, a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years was also in the crowd and touched Jesus' cloak with faith in his powers (the fringe of his cloak according to Matthew and Luke's accounts). Jesus then realizes that power has come out from him, tries to figure out who touched him, the disciples mock Jesus' question, Jesus sees who it was, and tells her she has been healed because of her faith. While the

story changes in minute ways over the course of the Synoptic tradition, each story is introduced and concluded in the same way with Jesus healing the woman for her faith.

All three accounts begin by bringing up what is wrong with the woman walking in the crowd. Mark and Luke's accounts mention respectively "she had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was no better..." (Mark 5:26) and that "though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone" (Luke 8:43). Both accounts describe the woman having seen many physicians, but according to Luke's account the woman had spent all of her money trying to be healed to no avail. In Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her*, she makes a point about the Lukan addition of the woman spending all of her money on doctors by saying,

These few terse words narrate forcefully the economic impoverishment of the incurably ill...this woman's predicament was not just incurable illness but also permanent uncleanness. She was not only unclean herself, but polluted everyone and everything with which she came in contact.¹²

The Lukan account is the only Synoptic Gospel to mention the economic effects of the hemorrhaging, but all three do report the woman's hemorrhaging for 12 years exactly. Schüssler Fiorenza's assessment of what the woman's life was like is reminiscent of the Samaritan woman's because just as the Samaritan woman was a "menstruant from the cradle," without any hope of getting to a better social state, the hemorrhaging woman has been put in a state of

¹² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: Student Christian Movement Press (SCM Press), 1983), 124.

“permanent uncleanness” and “polluted everyone and everything she came into contact with.”¹³

This brings us to the main theme of this synoptic story – Jesus dealing with a woman who is found to be unclean under the Jewish purity laws. The Jewish law that is constantly referenced in scholarship is seen in Leviticus 15:25:

If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean (Leviticus 15:25).

The Samaritan woman was seen as unclean from birth and now the hemorrhaging woman is also found in a permanent state of uncleanness as long as her discharge continues.

Witherington III notes “purity rules are symbolic norms, a cultural language that expresses and reflects larger social concerns that work in and apply in the Temple worship in Jerusalem.”¹⁴ One of these possible “larger social concerns” is elaborated on by Joel Marcus: “As in many other ancient and modern societies, such restrictions on bleeding women were based on the fear generated by the belief that blood contains life.”¹⁵ And if this was the fear, then it makes sense why in their commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Allison and Davies make note of another part of the law: “according to (Leviticus) 15:19-24 her infectious state can be transmitted through

¹³ De Boer, *Women (and men) in the Gospel and Community of John*, 214.

¹⁴ Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 60.

¹⁵ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 358.

touch.”¹⁶ With that in mind, Marcus goes back to the original passage from Leviticus 15 and notes “although impurity contracted through contact with clothes is less serious than impurity through contact with flesh it is still defiling...”¹⁷ Marcus’ point shows that there would have been people terrified of coming into contact with this woman for fear of her spreading her impurity to them. These references make it clear that there was a societal fear of bleeding women, there was uncertainty about what this constant bleeding would do if contracted to someone else, and there was an anxiety around touching anyone with this issue. This woman’s poverty is economic, social, and physical. In Stuart Love’s study of the women whom Jesus heals, he argues the healing of the hemorrhaging woman is not only related to the pollution boundaries of the human body, but also, “to pollution boundaries of the public, Israelite, social domain.”¹⁸ Later, Love adds, “according to the Pharisees world order, the hemorrhaging woman is ‘dirt.’ She is ‘out of place,’ not whole, imperfect. Her body is a bounded system.”¹⁹

This series of references shows the dire situation this woman has found herself in as she is walking through the crowd hoping to touch Jesus to be healed. First, she is impure because of Jewish Law; second, there is a fear about her condition that it can spread through touch; third, touching someone’s garment is not as bad as touching someone’s skin – but it is still passing impurity; finally, this woman would have been seen as “polluted,” both as a human and also socially, putting her at the bottom of the Israelite social ladder. With this context in mind, it should be apparent that the hemorrhaging woman is a loaded character when she appears in the Gospels. And when she touches Jesus, it is more than just a regular bump in that happens all the

¹⁶ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (London: T & T Clark International, 1991), 128.

¹⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 359.

¹⁸ Stuart L. Love, "Jesus and the Healing of Women," in *The Societal Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Fortress Press), 91.

¹⁹ Love, *Jesus and the Healing of Women*, 97.

time on busy streets – it could have very well been received with disgust and fear of the woman. Although she is going unnoticed, walking in the crowd, she becomes anything but unnoticeable when she reaches out to touch Jesus and he stops to figure out who touched him. Now, there is no outwardly apparent characteristic of this woman, to my knowledge, that would have given away what she was going through, so there is absolutely no reason to believe that while walking in the crowd people would have noticed her. With that being said, though, once she touches Jesus and he begins to look for her, she comes and falls down before him and tells him the “whole truth” (Mark 5:33). At this point in the narrative, she becomes very noticeable, obviously, as she falls down next to Jesus. It is possible that as she began to recount her issues there was a collective groan and withdrawal from the woman and Jesus, for fear of her hemorrhaging. As she is “fearing and trembling,” I imagine, so, too was the crowd as they found out they had been walking next to a woman with a flow of blood that (they thought) could be contracted by touch (Mark 5:33).

‘Told Him the Whole Truth’

After she tells Jesus the “whole truth,” Jesus reacts in a way that is very important in showcasing the way Jesus understood the woman. In Mark and Luke’s accounts respectively the woman comes and falls before Jesus and “told him the whole truth” and “declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him...” (Mark 5:33, Luke 8:47). Neither of these descriptions explains what (if any) details she told Jesus and the surrounding crowd about her circumstances. I argue, however, that she probably gives much of the information narrated before the scene takes place by the Gospel authors (which explains how the authors had the information of how long she had been bleeding and the economic effects, if one is to believe this was a historical account). None of the synoptic authors report what the reaction of the crowd was, but

Mark reports the woman came in “fear and trembling” and Luke just reports, “trembling” (Mark 5:33, Luke 8:47). Both of these could possibly be a result of fear of the crowd, but could also stem from being in the presence of Jesus. Allison and Davies make note of this in their commentary when discussing the faith of the woman: “The subject of her uncleanness is not mentioned or alluded to. Her touch does not affect indignation. Onlookers do not whisper that Jesus has come into contact with an unclean woman.”²⁰ Obviously indignation and whispers could very well have occurred, but the synoptic authors do not report them. What is reported, however, is the response of Jesus. In all three accounts, Jesus replies to the woman with some iteration of “Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well” (Matthew 9:22, Mark 5:34, Luke 8:48). Jesus does not mention her impureness or her social status; he instead calls her “daughter.” He brings her into his fold, and by calling her “daughter” ascribes her as one of his own. There appears to be no backlash, fear, or mention of the woman’s bleeding and instead an emphasis on giving her a new title to be whispered about amongst the crowd – a daughter of Jesus. The implications of this are huge for those in the crowd or reading this story years later. Jesus was approached by someone explicitly impure by the law, heals her, and calls her “daughter” – not “unclean” or “impure.”

The Dichotomy of the Disciples and the Hemorrhaging Woman

Again, much like the Samaritan woman is portrayed as a messenger-like figure against the backdrop of the aloof disciples, here the hemorrhaging woman is “rewarded” or “praised” by Jesus for her faith. In this story, I would argue that the faith of the woman is placed as a dichotomy next to, again, the ignorance of the disciples (in Mark) and Peter (in Luke) who are

²⁰ Allison and Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 128.

dumbfounded by Jesus asking who touched him within the giant crowd of people. In both the story of the Samaritan woman and the hemorrhaging woman, the disciples are worried about physical things – the food they have brought him from the city and the chance of finding the person who touched him, respectively. On the other hand, the Samaritan woman leaves her water jug to tell her community about Jesus and the hemorrhaging woman trembles in fear as she tells Jesus her story. In both cases the disciples do not understand why Jesus is not focused on the realities of the world while Jesus connects with the women on a different, more spiritual level.

The impact of the story of the hemorrhaging woman is lasting and far-reaching, because of the faith she displays, and also the powerful nature of the story. A woman on the outskirts of the social world, impure, unwanted, and poor (according to Luke), has the courage to reach for Jesus in hopes of getting better. More importantly for the purpose of this chapter, this story “reveals that Jesus rejected various sorts of prohibitions that would have separated him from those he came to seek and save...”²¹ Again the canonical Jesus was not afraid of the purity or social repercussions of his actions and has a meaningful interaction with a woman on the social outskirts of society, who is then depicted as understanding compared to Jesus’ closest companions, his disciples.

The Anointing Woman

There are very few pericopes that appear in each of the four canonical Gospels. Critical parts of Jesus’ life, like his birth, are not even recorded in all four. There is an argument to be made that when a narrative appears in each of the Canonical Gospels, it instantly gains a bit of

²¹ Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 62.

importance. If all four canonical authors found an event meaningful enough to put it in their respective Gospel, when according to the author of the Gospel of John “the world itself could not contain the books that would be written,” about all that Jesus did, I would suggest unanimous selection does prove that a story was deemed critical for understanding who Jesus was (John 21:25). For instance, Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, last supper, trials, death, and resurrection are all of utmost importance and serve as the climax in each Gospel. There is no argument to be had that these events are not critical to the overarching story of who Jesus was. Outside of the final events of Jesus’ life, there are other stories that make each canonical Gospel. These narratives include Jesus feeding the five thousand and the anointing of Jesus. Just like the story of Jesus’ last supper was important to early Gospel authors, I would argue that the story of the anointing woman was also imperative when talking about who Jesus was. The reason why each Gospel author found this story compelling enough to put in their respective Gospel is unknown, but it could be because Jesus, himself, in Matthew and Mark’s account says, “...wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mark 14:9). And if her story must be told in order to truly tell the gospel, then this story must make it into the individual Gospels. It is this very attitude that Jesus has toward the woman’s action that most eloquently explains the main thematic point I want to draw from this story: the act of the anointing was a sign of her understanding of Jesus (and his fate in Matthew, Mark and John), in contrast with the disciples who do not.

The Canonical Framework of the Anointing

The basic narrative present within all four accounts is that Jesus was reclining as a guest at a home when a woman anointed him with a very expensive ointment leading to one, or some, of the others present to get upset by this, so Jesus rebuked them, and then praised the woman.

Outside of this fundamental framework there are several differences in the narrative, some worth going into, others not worth touching. For instance, how much the ointment was worth – “a high price” in Matthew, “a year’s wages” in Mark and John – is not something worth addressing in grave detail for the purposes of this chapter. Instead of getting into the circumstantial details, I want to focus on the “why” behind the anointing. For example, if the woman is a friend and confidant of Jesus (as seen in the Gospel of John) and she is anointing him for burial, then the anointing carries a much different purpose than if it is an unknown woman (as seen in the Gospel of Luke) depicted as a sinner whose character is used as a vehicle for a parable about the debt of sin.

The Anointing in Matthew, Mark, and John – A Prophetic Act

In Matthew, Mark, and John’s account, the woman is anointing Jesus for preparation of burial, according to Jesus (Matthew 26:12, Mark 14:8, John 12:7). Although each of these Gospels does not agree verbatim on what happens, they are on the same page that this anointing is directly connected to Jesus’ burial. In Raymond Brown’s commentary on the Gospel of John he argues that the anointing in the Gospels of John and Mark (the Gospel of Matthew can be tied into this as well, seeing as it mirrors the Markan account) carry a prophetic notion.

The theological import of the anointing in both John and Mark is directed toward the burial of Jesus, and there is no evidence that the story was ever narrated in Christian circles without such a reference. If we have understood verse 7 correctly, Mary’s action

constituted an anointing of Jesus' body for burial, and thus unconsciously she performed a prophetic action.²²

Schüssler Fiorenza agrees with Brown's sentiment and makes the jump to compare the woman's prophetic notion to the other disciples who understand Jesus' identity and fate only partially when she notes, "While Peter had confessed, without truly understanding it, 'you are the anointed one,' the woman anointing Jesus recognizes clearly that Jesus' messiahship means suffering and death."²³ In other words, while the disciples are all talk, the anointing woman is all about action. Further, Schüssler Fiorenza says, "Since the prophet in the Old Testament anointed the head of the Jewish king, the anointing of Jesus' head must have been understood immediately as the prophetic recognition of Jesus, the Anointed, the Messiah, the Christ."²⁴ According to Brown, the Gospel of John's account is seen as relating to Jesus' burial as well, even though Mary anoints Jesus' feet and not his head.²⁵ In this tradition seen in Matthew, Mark, and John there is a clear purpose behind the action of the anointing woman, whether she is unknown woman (according to Matthew, Mark) or Mary of Bethany (according to John): to prepare Jesus' body for burial. With this purpose comes an underlying sense that the woman understands Jesus and his fate better than his disciples, which I will discuss at a greater length later in the chapter.

The Anointing in Luke – A Sinner and a Pharisee

The Gospel of Luke's account is drastically different from the other three Gospels in its characterization of the woman, location, place within the larger framework of the Gospel, and

²² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 454.

²³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xlv.

²⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xlv- xlv.

²⁵ See John 12:7

purpose, as a narrative. Most notably Luke's account has nothing to do with preparing Jesus for burial, and instead focuses more on the woman, herself, who is described as a "woman of the city" and "sinner" (Luke 7:37). When she enters the house she weeps on Jesus' feet, wipes the tears with her hair, kisses his feet, and anoints them. Instead of being upset about the waste of the perfume like the disciples are (or Judas, in the Gospel of John), Simon, a Pharisee, is distressed that Jesus should have known "who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him – that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39). Jesus then relays a parable that recounts two debtors owing different amounts and the creditor cancelling both of their debts, an allegory for the "sinning" woman and a "righteous" adherent to the law. Jesus then elaborates on the problem – Simon was a bad host. He did not give him water for his feet, did not kiss him, and did not anoint his head with oil, while the woman did all three. He then forgives the woman's sins, which leads to the others at the table to "say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?'" (Luke 7:9).

Witherington III speaks at great length on the Lukan account, focusing primarily on the kissing of the feet and the uncleanness of the act of wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. He notes, "Kissing the feet is usually the act of someone, such as a criminal, who has just been freed or whose debt was remitted, and in some sense this was the condition of the woman."²⁶ The purpose of the anointing in Luke 7 is tied to Jesus' appreciation of the woman's actions and his apathy toward her identity that the others in the room are bothered by. The story portrays Jesus as an arbiter of forgiving sins, which also gets the crowd riled up. It is clear, though, that the author of the Gospel of Luke is making a separate point by telling the story that he got from the Gospel of Mark. Although the Lukan account is different and is not tied to the imminent death of Jesus, it does depict an instance where Jesus is in contact with a woman deemed as a "sinner" and sides

²⁶ Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 56.

with her over the other men – a common theme throughout all three stories presented in this chapter.

The Dichotomy of the Disciples and the Anointing Woman

While all four accounts do not mirror each other identically, they all illustrate the anointing woman as right and understanding and the disciples as wrong and confused. Margaret Berine wrote a book focusing on the “discipleship of equals” in the Gospel of John, and in her discussion of the Johannine account of the anointing she calls Mary, the “par excellence for the reader in the face of Jesus’ imminent passion and death,” and says that Mary is “the true disciple” while “Judas’ public discipleship is a sham.”²⁷ Witherington III says in the Lukan account Jesus “transcends the letter of the laws of clean and unclean in the presence of a Pharisee...because of his own priorities,” and suggests that the woman’s action “is more welcome to him than that of his host”²⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza focuses on the Markan account (transmitted to Matthew) where while “the leading male disciples do not understand this suffering messiahship of Jesus, reject it, and finally abandon him, the women disciples...suddenly emerge as the true disciples.”²⁹ In all four accounts Jesus is appreciative of the woman’s action – no matter if she is unknown, a woman of the city, or a friend. The woman in Matthew and Mark has “done a beautiful thing,” the woman in Luke has her sins forgiven and is told her faith has saved her, and Mary of Bethany is told to keep the ointment for Jesus’ day of burial after he tells Judas to “leave her alone.” Berine and Schüssler Fiorenza both argue the

²⁷ Margaret M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 150.

²⁸ Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 56.

²⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xlv.

story paints the anointing woman as the true disciple compared to the men who do not understand the fate of Jesus.

‘In Memory of Her’

Schüssler Fiorenza titles her magnum opus *In Memory of Her* because of the phrase that Jesus says at the end of the Markan (and Matthean) account: “Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Mark 14:9). While she is more concerned with feminist theology and how androcentric textual interpretation can often be, Schüssler Fiorenza makes a point about the narrative that cannot go unmentioned: “While the stories of Judas and Peter are engraved in the memory of Christians, the story of the woman is virtually forgotten.”³⁰ While her name may be unknown or falsified and her story changed around to make a larger point, the anointing woman represented in the canonical Gospels performed an act that was seen as beautiful, appreciated, and in some accounts prophetic by Jesus, while his disciples watched on in ignorance.

Although these three stories have vastly different plots – a conversion, a healing, and an anointing – they each have two major things in common: the disciples’ confusion and lack of understanding toward Jesus and the positive response that Jesus offers each woman he is talking with. First, Jesus is speaking to the Samaritan woman who is viewed by the men (in most cases the disciples) as not worth Jesus’ time. The disciples are “marveled that he was talking with a woman” in John 4 and badger him about eating the food they have brought him. Then, the disciples are dumbfounded that Jesus wants to stop and figure out who touched him in the giant crowd in the synoptic accounts of the hemorrhaging woman. And the men (disciples in Matthew, “some” people in Mark, a Pharisee in Luke, Judas Iscariot in John) are upset that the woman who

³⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xlii.

anointed Jesus wasted the expensive ointment in Matthew, Mark, and John and call the woman a sinner who should not touch Jesus in Luke. Secondly, in each story Jesus is affirming what the women have done or will do. After a conversation with the Samaritan woman where Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah (John 4:25), many Samaritans come to believe in him because of the woman. Upon healing the hemorrhaging woman of her ailment, Jesus said, “her faith has made her well” (Mark 5:34). Later, after explaining the action and context of why the woman anointed Jesus, he tells her that “she has done a beautiful thing” and says that when the gospel is proclaimed “what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Mark 14:9). These two commonalities – the women’s understanding compared to the disciples and Jesus’ appreciation for what they have done – depicts Jesus’ love not only for the outcasts of society, but also for the nameless women whom he meets.

CHAPTER 3: WOMEN AND THE HISTORICAL JESUS WHY JESUS' APOCALYPTIC TEACHINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN ATTRACTIVE TO WOMEN

When it comes to evaluating Jesus' relationship with women, dissecting the company he kept and reviewing how he treated women whom he met are both valid methods for interpreting and discussing this association. But to assess the totality of the impact Jesus had on women on these grounds would leave the vast majority of women out of the equation.

In order to discover the entirety of this relationship, it is necessary to turn to the teachings of Jesus. A closer examination at what the historical Jesus was preaching allows for women of the time of Jesus who never met him to become a part of the discussion. For example, a large portion of women living in the areas Jesus traveled through never spoke or saw Jesus. Instead, they may have heard the rumblings of his teachings and saw the crowds forming for him, leading them to wonder what Jesus was talking about. Additionally, there were women who were in those crowds, but never directly interacted with Jesus and only knew him from what he preached. This chapter intends to focus on what the historical Jesus would have been teaching that may have interested the women in those crowds. Although these women's thoughts and perceptions are not recorded, their view of Jesus and what he thought of them is still equally important – if not more – in trying to decide Jesus' impact on women. I will examine a major theme of the historical Jesus' teaching and argue that it would have deeply resonated with women. Although there are several different teachings that could help fill out this gap the Historical Jesus' apocalyptic discourses and vision of how to act in light

of the imminent kingdom would have not only been well known amongst passers-by, but also would have attracted women for years to come to accept the worldview Jesus was preaching about.

Jesus, the Apocalypticist

In order to prove that women were affected by Jesus' apocalyptic preaching, I must first settle that Jesus was, in fact, an apocalypticist. The topic of Jesus as an apocalyptic teacher has been well documented over the last century, with renowned scholars such as Bart Ehrman and E.P. Sanders writing books on the idea. Many of the monographs on Jesus as an apocalypticist deal with this through the lens of the historical Jesus. Their findings are in large part grounded in critical historical methods in order to find the bare bones of who Jesus truly was. This will be a useful approach in attempting to reconstruct which of Jesus' teachings would have been appealing to women of the time.

In Ehrman's *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, he spends the first several chapters of his work providing socio-historical context for the life of Jesus, working on painting a portrait of what the historical Jesus looks like, and determining which criteria can be used to best ascertain what the historical Jesus truly said and did. The last half of the book deals with the historical Jesus as an apocalypticist who stands "in a long line of Jewish prophets who understood that God was soon going to intervene

in this world...”¹ Ehrman reaches this point by surveying several of Jesus’ sayings, but also by laying out an argument that I find to be the most compelling – Jesus’ ministry both began and ended in a cloud of apocalypticism; therefore, the middle must have also been apocalyptic.

Jesus and John the Baptist

All three of the synoptic Gospels recount Jesus beginning his ministry by being baptized by John the Baptist, and the Gospel of John recounts John the Baptist seeing “the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove” on Jesus (John 1:32). What is known about John the Baptist – a man clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt who is eating locusts and wild honey – includes his preaching of a rather apocalyptic message. In Matthew 3, John the Baptist tells some Pharisees and Sadducees, “Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:10) and later, “His (the one who is coming after John the Baptist) winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12).² Dale C. Allison and William D. Davies note in their commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, “The three major verbs in 3:10 ‘is cut down’, ‘is laid’, and ‘is cast’ are in the present tense, and in 3:7 the wrath is said to be ‘coming’. We should therefore interpret the present tense as implying certainty and immediacy.”³ This Matthean pericope depicts John the Baptist preaching that the end is here (the ax is at the root), a

¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 21.

² See Luke 3:17.

³ William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 311.

final judgment awaits (trees not bearing good fruit and chaff will be thrown into the fire), and Jesus (the one who is coming after) will play a role in this eschatological event. Further, in the Lukan account of Jesus' baptism, the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers ask John the Baptist how they should act since the end is near and he replies, "whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise...collect no more than the amount prescribed to you...do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation..." (Luke 3:11-14). Joseph Fitzmyer comments on this section of John the Baptist's preaching by noting, "John's ethical preaching follows on the heels of eschatological preaching, and it is obviously colored by the latter."⁴ John the Baptist is not only using apocalyptic language, but he is also discussing how people should act in the present time, which Jesus does, as well.

The portrait that the canonical Gospels paint of John the Baptist clearly points toward an apocalyptic prophet who is expecting the imminent end of the world. If Jesus did not agree with John the Baptist on this, he could have very easily not been baptized by him or been baptized by someone else. Ehrman comments on this by noting "nobody compelled (Jesus), he must have gone to John, instead of to someone else, because he agreed with John's message."⁵ In Frederick J. Murphy's review of apocalypticism seen throughout the Bible, he agrees with Ehrman's notion: "Jesus began his public life by accepting John's baptism for repentance in the face of God's imminent intervention in history. This indicates that Jesus subscribed to John's eschatological message."⁶ Sanders

⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, The Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 465.

⁵ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 111.

⁶ Frederick J. Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 287.

agrees with the conclusion, as well, as he states that Jesus “started his public career in close relationship” to John the Baptist who “was an eschatological prophet who called Israel to repent in view of the coming kingdom.”⁷

Jesus and the Early ‘Christian’ Church

Understanding that Jesus started his ministry in association with an “eschatological prophet” who was preaching a message of repentance in view of the coming kingdom, I will now turn briefly to the result of Jesus’ ministry, which is depicted in the canonical Gospels as concluding with the death and resurrection of Jesus. By simply reviewing the other texts found in the New Testament, it is apparent that many of the early churches are “imbued with apocalyptic thinking.”⁸ I will give a few examples found within authentic “Pauline” literature.⁹ At the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, after dealing with the issue of the bodily resurrection, Paul says,

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Cor 15:51-52).

Here, Paul is using the pronoun “we” clearly expecting for this trumpet to sound bringing in the kingdom as something that he will experience, as well. Then in his first letter to the

⁷ E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: First Fortress Press, 1985), 93.

⁸ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 111.

⁹ See Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 308-309, for further discussion on authentic Pauline literature.

Thessalonians (also widely regarded as the earliest Pauline epistle in the New Testament) Paul writes, “ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).¹⁰ Again Paul is using “we” to include himself in the people who will be left to meet the Lord in the air. Why Paul thought he would be meeting the Lord in the air is a different story for a different thesis, but the concept that this imminent end is coming soon is still clear. Finally, in Romans 13, Paul writes, “...you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers...” (Romans 13:11). He puts it a slightly different way in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 when he says, “For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2).¹¹ These two passages showcase Paul’s belief that this coming kingdom could come at any moment – “like a thief in the night” – and that in the meantime people need to “wake from sleep.” There is a real sense that Paul, and by the transitive property the early churches he was writing to, believed that their world was coming to an end and soon they would be transformed.

Connecting John the Baptist and the Early ‘Christian’ Church

Understanding Jesus’ relationship with John the Baptist and the early church’s foundation in Jesus’ teaching leads Ehrman to this conclusion:

¹⁰ See Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 324-337; esp. 324.

¹¹ See 2 Peter 3:10.

The only connection between the apocalyptic John and the apocalyptic Christian church was Jesus himself. How could both the beginning and the end be apocalyptic, if the middle was not, as well? My conclusion is that Jesus himself must have been a Jewish apocalypticist.¹²

Similarly, Sanders notes that Jesus' ties to John the Baptist and the arrival of the church, "tell us the same thing about the life and work of Jesus: they were set in a framework of Jewish eschatological expectation."¹³

Jesus' Apocalypticism Within His Teachings

Both Ehrman and Sanders' postulations touch on what the "middle" – the life and works of Jesus – may have looked like in regard to the beginning and the end of his ministry. I want to turn to this "middle" that they discuss and analyze what the early Christian writings report about Jesus as an apocalypticist. It is critical to understand what Jesus' apocalyptic teachings looked like in order to reach a conclusion on how they would have affected women. I will present a few verses that showcase Jesus' penchant to preach a message of repentance from the world with an addendum that the end times are near. I argue that repentance and change are inextricably tied to the apocalypticism that Jesus is preaching. He is not just simply teaching that the world is soon going to be over and that a new kingdom will come, but that people need to change the way they are living

¹² Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 112.

¹³ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 91.

and treating others due to the coming kingdom being a home of a “renewed social order.”¹⁴

‘The Kingdom of God has Come Near; Repent, and Believe’

A perfect example of this theme in Jesus’ teachings is seen in the Gospel of Mark just before the transfiguration is recounted. Jesus is foretelling his disciples that the Son of Man is going to have to go through great suffering and even be killed. This leads an upset Peter to pull Jesus aside and “rebuke him” (Mark 8:33). Jesus then “called the crowds with the disciples” and says to them,

Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power’ (Mark 8:38).

Jesus calls the present generation “adulterous and sinful” and tells the crowd that if they are ashamed of him now, that they will be ashamed when the Father comes at the end of times. This implies, I argue, that he is telling the crowd to repent of their “adulterous and sinful” ways because judgment is coming, and to prepare for when the Father will arrive with his holy angels. Jesus then says that some of those listening to him “will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” In this moment Jesus does not mince words or leave things up for symbolic interpretation, I

¹⁴ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 232.

argue. As the world continues, though, this passage is often interpreted symbolically as readers attempt to reconcile what Jesus said with the present realities of the world's existence. I argue that Jesus truly believed that there are people in his presence who would not die before the Kingdom came.¹⁵ It is clear that this strain of thought was very present in the early church, as seen in 1 Thessalonians where Paul spends part of his letter trying to explain to the group in Thessalonica that those who have already died also have the ability to enter the coming kingdom.¹⁶ The people whom he was writing to were legitimately worried about their death quite possibly because they did not imagine anyone would die before the kingdom came in its full glory. This Markan passage highlights the two key points of Jesus' apocalyptic preaching: repent from your sinful ways because the kingdom is coming in your lifetime.

This theme of repentance in light of the coming kingdom is seen most explicitly during Jesus' first preaching in Galilee when the Gospels of Mark and Matthew respectively record him saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news," (Mark 1:15) and "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). Commenting on Mark 1:15, Joel Marcus notes, "Jesus' inaugural preaching is thoroughly apocalyptic, since it speaks of the death of the gold age, the birth of the new, and the human reorientation necessitated and elicited by cosmic change."¹⁷ The author of the Gospel of Luke, though, who was writing later than the author of Mark and possibly Matthew, does not have these same verses. As time passes

¹⁵ See Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 620.

¹⁶ See 1 Thess 4:13-16.

¹⁷ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 140.

from the life of Jesus, the author of the Gospel of Luke is possibly making a redactional decision because Jesus' words were not fulfilled and the kingdom had not yet come. In the Markan and Matthean accounts Jesus explicitly says to repent and then notes that "the time is fulfilled" in Mark and that the kingdom "has come near" in both Matthew and Mark. But Jesus is not just saying that the "time is fulfilled" or that the kingdom "has come near," instead he is adding a prerequisite, to repent. I agree with Murphy's assessment of Jesus' call for repentance and notion of a coming kingdom as plain and simple, "an apocalyptic pronouncement."¹⁸

A more complex example of Jesus' call for repentance in the face of the coming kingdom comes in Luke 12:39 when he says, "But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into."¹⁹ There is obviously an apocalyptic tone to this message as Jesus threatens that the people will not know the hour in which the kingdom will come, but I would argue there is an underlying call for repentance within this saying, as well. If the homeowner had known when the thief was coming he or she would have been prepared and taken the necessary actions to ready himself or herself for what was coming. I argue Jesus is using this allegory to explain that just like the homeowner would have been ready if he or she knew when the break-in was happening, so too must people prepare their lives for the coming kingdom that may come at any moment. And in order for the people to be fully prepared, they must repent from their sinful ways and arrange their life in a way that will be pleasing in the coming kingdom.

¹⁸ Murphy, *Apocalypticism in the Bible and Its World: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 286.

¹⁹ See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, 985-988.

The Gospel of Thomas

Another useful source for learning about the historical Jesus' teachings comes from a few similar passages in the Gospel of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas is a non-canonical text found near the village of Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. It contains 114 sayings of Jesus, and no birth, passion, or resurrection account. In Ehrman's *The New Testament and Early Christian Writings Reader*, he notes that

Some scholars have maintained the sayings of Thomas may be closer to what Jesus actually taught than what we find in the New Testament; others, however, have pointed out the theology implicit in the more gnostic teachings cannot be dated with confidence prior to the beginning of the second century.²⁰

Within the Gospel of Thomas' 114 sayings, an apocalyptic tone rings throughout many of Jesus' words. In the canonical Gospels it is possible to experience the kingdom through one's present reality. This is available, as well, in the Gospel of Thomas, through *gnosis*, or divine, spiritual knowledge. This *gnosis*, if interpreted correctly, could lead to immortality, which is hinted on in the first saying of the Gospel of Thomas: "And he said: Whoever finds the correct interpretations of these sayings will never die."²¹ In saying 3 Jesus says "If your leaders say to you 'Look! The kingdom is in the sky!' then the birds will be there before you are. If they say that the kingdom is in the sea, then the

²⁰ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 117.

²¹ Stevan L. Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas: Annotated & Explained* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2013), 3.

fish will be there before you are. Rather, the kingdom is within you and is outside of you.”²² And in saying 113 Jesus responds to the disciples’ question of when the kingdom is coming by noting, “It is not coming in any easily observable manner. People will not be saying, ‘Look, it’s over here’ or ‘Look, it’s over there.’ Rather, the kingdom of the Father is already spread out on the earth, and people aren’t aware of it.”²³ In Stevan Davies commentary of these two sayings he notes a commonality in Jesus’ message between the two: “...the kingdom is here now, and people must learn to discern it rather than waiting for some cosmic miracle.”²⁴ What it looks like to discern the kingdom or understand that the kingdom is within someone is different in the Gospel of Thomas than it is when a similar saying appears in the Gospel of Luke (17:20-21). In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, “if you do not fast as regards the world, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not observe the Sabbath as a Sabbath, you will not see the father.”²⁵ Davies explains Jesus’ teaching by arguing, “they should be able to see [the kingdom] through their own inner light...one should radiate light into the world and receive that light back from the kingdom.”²⁶ The Gospel of Thomas portrays Jesus as a spiritual teacher full of wisdom and divine knowledge which is different than the canonical Jesus undoubtedly, but it is clear that both depictions of Jesus insist on the kingdom being attainable in through actions and/or knowledge in the present.

²² Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas: Annotated & Explained*, 5.

²³ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas: Annotated & Explained*, 117.

²⁴ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas: Annotated & Explained*, 117.

²⁵ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas: Annotated & Explained*, 39.

²⁶ Davies, *The Gospel of Thomas: Annotated & Explained*, 38.

Women's Attraction to Jesus' Message

The previous verses and sayings show Jesus as someone who was set on preaching for change in the present directly because of the eschatological event in the close future (especially in the canonical Gospels). This, I argue, is where women enter the scene. If Jesus is crying out for people to repent, then what does that look like practically? Does this repentance mean treating people differently, and if so, whom?

The *Basileia*

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza tackles this question at great length in her monograph *In Memory of Her*, where she argues,

The power of God's *basileia* is realized in Jesus's table community with the poor, the sinners, the tax collectors, and prostitutes – with all those who 'do not belong' to the 'holy people,' who are somehow deficient in the eyes of the righteous.²⁷

Schüssler Fiorenza is arguing that in the light of the coming kingdom – the *basileia* – the people who “do not belong” are the ones who are being lifted up by Jesus' ministry, drawing from verses like Matthew 19:30 where Jesus says “But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.” In Ehrman's examination of how the historical Jesus could have treated women, he argues that if women were seen as “inferior” – fitting into this category of people that Schüssler Fiorenza says “do not belong” – then it is possible

²⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: Student Christian Movement Press (SCM Press), 1983), 121.

that “Jesus would have associated freely with them, and that they would have been particularly intrigued by his proclamation of the coming kingdom.”²⁸ To Ehrman’s point, I have previously argued Jesus was associating freely with women in my first two chapters and now, I am arguing that women would have been “intrigued” by Jesus’ “proclamation of the coming kingdom.”

It is clear to Schüssler Fiorenza that women would have been interested in Jesus’ coming kingdom for what was to come in the future, but also because there was an expectation for change in the present: “Exegetes agree that it is the mark of Jesus’ preaching and ministry that he proclaimed the *basileia* of God as future and present, eschatological vision and experiential reality.”²⁹ Sanders similarly notes, “...there is no difficulty at all about having ‘kingdom’ in some sense present and in another sense ‘future.’”³⁰ Further on the notion of how to act in the present, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, “Everydayness can become revelatory, and the presence and power of God’s sacred wholeness can be experienced in *every* human being.”³¹ Her emphasis here on “every” is highlighting that in Jesus’ vision men and women, rich and poor, and righteous and unrighteous, are all not only going to be a part of the kingdom, but should be treated as equals in the present time. Schüssler Fiorenza says it more eloquently than I can: “...this future is meditated and promised to *all* members of Israel. No one is exempted. Everyone is invited. Women as well as men, prostitutes as well as Pharisees.”³² Ehrman agrees with

²⁸ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 150.

²⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 120.

³⁰ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 151.

³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 120.

³² Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 121.

Schüssler Fiorenza on the idea that this coming kingdom Jesus is talking about is not clothed in symbolism. It is something that Jesus describes as very real and material.

...when Jesus refers to this coming kingdom, in which God will reign, he does not appear to be thinking in purely symbolic terms about God becoming the ruler of your heart. For he often describes the kingdom with graphically tactile language. Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God ‘coming in power,’ about people ‘entering into,’ the Kingdom, about people ‘eating and drinking in the Kingdom’ with Jewish ancestors, about his disciples serving as ‘rulers’ of the Kingdom, sitting in actual ‘thrones’ in the royal court.³³

But before this physical, material kingdom comes, Jesus was still advocating for change in the present time – and women were a part of this message. Schüssler Fiorenza notes, “His announcement of ‘eschatological reversal’ – many who are first will be last and those last will be first (Mark 10:31, Matthew 19:30, 20:16, Luke 13:30) – applies to women and to their impairment by patriarchal structures.”³⁴ Later she goes on to argue,

The future can be experienced in the healings, the inclusive discipleship, and the parabolic words of Jesus, but Jesus still hopes and expects the inbreaking of God’s *basileia*, when death, suffering, and injustice finally will be overcome and patriarchal marriage will be no more.^{35 36}

³³ Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 114.

³⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 121.

³⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 121.

There is a real sense, Schüssler Fiorenza declares, that Jesus expected there to be great change in this now, but not yet period of time, where anticipation for the kingdom was supposed to completely alter one's perception of how they should treat others. As Marcus puts it, Jesus is preaching that there is a need for a "human reorientation" that is demanded because of the "cosmic change" coming.³⁷ In Ross Shepard Kraemer's *Her Share of the Blessings* she argues that one cannot see the Jesus movement's "intense eschatological belief" that the "imminent end of the current world order" was coming without seeing the "advocat(ion of) a radical interim ethic that had far reaching eschatological beliefs for social roles, including those associated with gender distinction for social roles."³⁸ In a similar vein, Ehrman notes, "...we should not forget that Jesus urged his followers to begin to implement the ideals of the Kingdom in the present in anticipation of the coming Son of Man."³⁹ And one of these ideals to be implemented,

...may indeed have been some form of equality practiced among the men and women who accompanied Jesus on his itinerant preaching ministry – not as the first step toward reforming society from the grass roots, but as preparation for the new world that was soon to come.⁴⁰

³⁶ See Mark 12:18-27.

³⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, 140.

³⁸ Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1994), 138.

³⁹ Ehrman, *Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 150.

⁴⁰ Ehrman, *Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 150.

The distinction that Ehrman makes at the end of this statement is critical to my larger point about Jesus' apocalyptic message that goes all the way back to Jesus' ties with John the Baptist: this equality between men and women that may have been practiced was directly correlated to the anticipation for a coming kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming. Ehrman does qualify this statement by limiting the discussion to men and women who were a part of his "itinerant preaching ministry" which is fair because information about how women whom never met Jesus and were passers-by is not available. But I would argue that both Schüssler Fiorenza and Ehrman lay the groundwork for a strong case that it would have been nearly impossible to listen to the historical Jesus preach and not walk away with a changed mindset on how one should live in the present age in light of the coming kingdom. Further, if equality was being practiced within Jesus' itinerant ministry, it is very plausible that it would have been overtly visible to those watching and would have served as an example of how to live in the present age.

A Concrete Example: Divorce

Jesus' teachings on divorce are a clear picture of a new ethic in light of the coming kingdom that would have been appealing to women. It was custom that "at the time of her marriage, Jewish woman lost all rights in the determination of her body, the marriage itself as well as the properties of her marriage, the determination of divorce, children..." according to Arthur Frederick Ide's monograph *Jews, Jesus, and Woman in the Apostolic Age*.⁴¹ Ide explains that "divorce was a possibility only if the man had found

⁴¹ Arthur Frederick Ide, *Jews, Jesus & Woman in the Apostolic Age: With a Synopsis, Parallel Translation & Critical Commentary on New Testament References to Women in*

‘some impropriety’ in the relationship (see Deut 24:1)...later Talmudic writers define this impropriety as something that ‘brings humiliation, downcast looks, and a wounded heart.’⁴² Further, Ehrman points out that women who were financially reliant on their husbands could be lead into “abject poverty and misery” if they had a divorce.⁴³ Jesus takes on divorce throughout his teachings, most notably in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:31-32 when he delivers an antithetical statement: “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” Jesus says that even though the law says divorce is allowed if a certificate is given, that the law is not strict enough. Instead, divorce should only be an option of adultery by the woman is involved. Jesus goes a step further than that in Mark 10:4-9 when he uses the creation of man and woman to argue that just as God made “them male and female” and married husband and wife become “one flesh,” and what God joins together no one should separate. In Luke 16:18 Jesus says, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.”

These three verses highlight a new ethic that Jesus is ushering in toward divorce. While the law says men must only give a letter to get divorced, Jesus says no divorce at all unless the woman commits adultery (Matthew 5:31-32), forbids divorce entirely (Mark 10:4-9), and argues that divorce and re-marriage is adultery (essentially forbidding divorce) (Luke 16:18). Witherington III argues that these passages reject “various

the Life & Ministry of Jesus Christ and the Apostleship He Commissioned Women to Join. (Mesquite, Texas, U.S.A.: Ide House 1984), 18.

⁴² Ide, *Jews, Jesus & Woman in the Apostolic Age*, 19-20.

⁴³ Ehrman, *Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 137.

stereotypes of women as temptresses...and at the same time a woman is given greater security in marriage by making the man responsible for its continued maintenance and by prohibiting man from using his power to cause its dissolution.”⁴⁴

This teaching cannot be understood apart from its connection to the coming kingdom. In Matthew 22 the Sadducees ask Jesus about a situation where a woman marries a man who dies and then goes on to be married to his seven brothers as they each die off. The Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection, ask Jesus whose wife would the woman be in the resurrection? Jesus replies, “You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (Matt 22:29-30). Schüssler Fiorenza says the Sadducees “do not recognize that ‘in the world’ of the living God patriarchal marriage does not exist either for men or for women.”⁴⁵ Further, “it is not that sexual differentiation and sexuality do not exist in the ‘world’ of God, but that ‘patriarchal marriage is no more...’”⁴⁶ Jesus describes a coming kingdom where women will no longer be stuck in patriarchal marriage or reliant on men to provide for them, but will instead be “persons who live in the presence of the living God.”⁴⁷

Women who heard Jesus say this, or some variation of his stance on divorce, would almost certainly be attracted to it. While the Jewish law said man must present a certificate and nothing else, Jesus argues that divorce should be forbidden and that in the resurrection “they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Matt 20:30). Divorce serves

⁴⁴ Ben Witherington, III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus: A Study of Jesus’ Attitudes to Women and Their Roles as Reflected in his Earthly Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 28.

⁴⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 145.

⁴⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 144.

⁴⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 145.

as an example of one of Jesus' teachings calling for a new way of life in light of the coming kingdom that would have strongly affected the women who heard his preaching.

The task of proving that women would have been drawn to Jesus' message of repentance and a renewed social order due to the coming kingdom is impossible without more information. There are simply no texts that I am aware of that detail exactly how women felt about Jesus and his teachings, so attempting to reconstruct how they would have felt is, well, nothing more than an attempt. But grabbing hold of one of Jesus' core themes in his teachings and excavating into how it would have affected women is a method that I find not only sufficient, but the best method available. Shepard Kraemer finds this technique to be adequate, as well, when she argues,

Although we cannot definitely demonstrate self-conscious motives of early adherents, the possibly connections between the consequences of becoming Christian and the various levels of motivation warrant a detailed analysis of the consequences for women who made such choices.⁴⁸

I am falling in line with Shepard Kraemer's argument that although impossible to "demonstrate self-conscious motives" there are a host of connections that can be studied to assist in finding what motivation women may have had in joining the Jesus movement. Upon a close examination of the origins of Jesus' ministry with John the Baptist, his effect on the formation of the eschatology of the early "Christian" church, and his repeated call for repentance before the end of times, I find explicit notions of the

⁴⁸ Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 140.

historical Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet who was advocating for change in the societal order of the present in anticipation of a kingdom that will bear fruits of equality. And while scholars often point to “sinners” as the center of this renewal, I am arguing that women – embroiled in a patriarchal structure and stuck at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the time – would have embraced this message of renewal and equality, as well.

CONCLUSION

Understanding Jesus as a teacher who had women followers, met with women all throughout his ministry, and preached messages attractive to women leads to several implications. Most prominently it forces the question of why many Christians have treated women as complementary, not equal, to men. Further, it leads to enquiring why a patriarchal structure has not just been sustained but has flourished under the watch of branches of Christianity to this day. A close examination of Jesus' relationship with women does not lend itself to a reading of Jesus believing that women were secondary to men. On the contrary, it is Jesus' women followers who are at the empty tomb and are commissioned to tell the good news, not the disciples. It is the women whom Jesus meets that understand the spiritual realities that he is talking about, while the disciples worry about the physical needs of the world. It is the women, along with others who are embedded at the bottom of the social ladder, who will inherit Jesus' coming kingdom, not the rich (men) rulers. I argue that complementarianism does not find its roots in life and teachings of Jesus. Instead, it draws its origins from passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 that not only disallow women from teaching, but say they must "learn in quietness and full submission" and cover their heads when they pray. These stringent requirements for women have faded in most Christian churches, but what remains is a rather dangerous form of silent understanding that women were not made to lead in the church. What is seen in Jesus' interactions is not a teacher who thought women should be silent and abide by social or purity norms and laws. Instead, he rejects the Samaritan woman's fear of him speaking with her because of her ethnic makeup, he

calls the hemorrhaging woman “daughter” and rewards her for her faith, and he says that when the gospel is preached throughout the world what the anointing woman did will also be told. Similarly on this point Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues

While – for apologetic reasons – the post-Pauline and post-Petrine writers seek to limit women’s leadership roles in the Christian community to roles which are culturally and religiously acceptable, the evangelists called Mark and John highlight the alternative character of the Christian community, and therefore accord women apostolic and ministerial leadership.¹

Schüssler Fiorenza explains that in the “historical retrospective the New Testament’s stress...on submission and patriarchal superordination has won out over its stress... on altruistic love and ministerial service. Yet this ‘success’ can not be justified theologically, since it cannot claim the authority of Jesus.”² Schüssler Fiorenza is arguing that although there are passages in the New Testament that call for “submission” and “patriarchal superordination” the roots do not go back to Jesus. Rather, “what women have done is not totally forgotten because the Gospel story remembers that the discipleship and apostolic leadership of women are integral parts of Jesus’ ‘alternative’ praxis of *agape* and service.”³ Just as submission has won out over altruistic love, Schüssler Fiorenza notes that the names and stories of men have survived while the

¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: Student Christian Movement Press (SCM Press), 1983), 334.

² Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 335.

³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 334.

women have been forgotten. Those who betray and deny Jesus – Judas and Peter – are remembered, but the woman who understands the fate of Jesus and anoints him, loses her name over time.

While a complementary attitude (rather than an egalitarian) toward women may continue to be prevalent and the women who played prominent roles in the story of Jesus' life may continue to be overlooked, this thesis at its core argues that Jesus affirmed women in his ministry, interactions, and teachings. Within this study, I find that Jesus' women followers ministered with him, provided for him, and learned from him. Their roles are often lost and mistranslated due to an androcentric translation of the text, but their presence at the tomb showcases the trust in their witness that Jesus had in them. I contend that Jesus met with women throughout his ministry who he endorsed as messengers of his gospel, daughters in his kingdom, and understanding agents. In the three instances I address specifically, the women characters are presented as comprehending Jesus at a deeper level than the disciples do not yet understand. And finally I argue Jesus preached a message that called for a renewed social order uplifting the lowly (including women) in preparation for the kingdom that would come soon after his death. His apocalyptic discourses in general – and specifically his stance on divorce – would have been particularly evocative to the women listening.

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